House Unit Clears Bill for Access To Nixon Papers

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A House subcommittee yesterday approved a bill similar to one passed by the Senate to protect and assure public access to Richard M. Nixon's presidential tapes and papers.

The panel headed by Rep. John Brademas (D-Ind.) added a section creating a commission to make recommendations by March 31, 1975, for permanent public policy on the question of who owns the official records of Presidents and other federal officials. It has been traditional for Presidents to take their papers with them when they leave office, but there is no law or court decision on the subject.

The Nixon bill passed the Senate six weeks ago, in response to a Nixon agreement with the government that would have given him control of his records and raised the possibility that tapes and other materials detailing his role in Watergate might be destroyed.

The agreement provided that the tapes be preserved for at least five years unless Mr. Nixon died sooner, in which case they would be destroyed. The agreement has not been put into effect. A suit by Mr. Nixon to put it into effect immediately has been heard in U.S. District Court here and may be decided soon.

The Brademas Bill, which is to go to the full House Administration Committee Thursday and may reach the House floor early in December, directs the General Services Administration to keep possession of all the Nixon tapes and papers and forbids destruction of any of them without congressional approval.

The measure does not decide ownership, postponing that decision until the commission has made its study. The bill provides that if the courts should rule that Mr. Nixon is the lawful owner, the government would pay him just compensation but would keep the records under its power of eminent domain.

The bill assures access to all the Nixon records by the Watergate special prosecutor and other government agencies. It also directs the GSA to draw up regulations, which could be vetoed by either House, providing public access to Mr. Nixon's Watergate materials and other materials that are of "general historical significance."